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## BATTLE SONGS OF SERBIA

At the small town of Klitchèvatz on the Danube between Semendria and Ram, was stationed a Serbian military unit. On the high hills overlooking the river some masked guns had sent whirring shells into Austrian trenches before the sunshine of a September afternoon gave place to the darkness of chill evening. The foot soldier had retired to his dugout and was cleaning his rifle after the scattered skirmishing of the day. Down the long hill and into the village came a tramping column of infantry: they were moving up to take positions in the first line of defence. Austrian aeroplanes had returned to their hangars with the coming of night, and these troops marched the roads in the half gloom of a late twilight, secure from attack. Leaving Nish, they had each borne a flower in the muzzle of the gun, but now the posies were forgotten, and bayonets gleamed through the dimness of darkening night. It was not too dark, however, to distinguish a large man, full of travel, who marched in the first rank and sent his huge voice booming across the stillness as he led his companions in song. It seemed as though a shadowy figure from out the past had come again, a minstrel to sing the warriors to battle, an idealist to stir the heart of the very soldier:—

Hear, ye brother Slavonians,  
A Serbian mother's voice.  
Enemies are rising  
Our downfall to rejoice,  
To soil by vandal force  
Our honor sanctified.  
For liberty and Serbia  
Oh, God, with us abide.  
Come, oh come! Serbians arise,  
Follow, brothers, follow,  
For home and family ties.

Rally now, ye Serbians true,  
To battle without dread.  
Take up the rifle, grip the sword,  
The powder and the lead.  
Don't allow the race to die,  
Name and tongue so dear.

Fight to keep your liberty,  
Then slavery never fear.  
Come, oh come! Serbians arise,  
Follow, brothers, follow,  
For home and family ties.

Mighty Marco Kraljevitch,  
Bring forth your golden mace ;  
Petar Karageorgevitch,  
Lead on your loyal race.  
Shield the people from disgrace,  
And let us bravely die  
For Serbia, our Mother dear,  
While you hear our battle cry ;  
Come, oh come, Serbians arise,  
Follow, brothers, follow,  
For home and family ties.

Nor is it fantastic to speak thus of the modern Serbian soldier. Out of the past there comes to him in history and in song a long tradition of warfare. Serbia occupies a central position on the Balkan "bridge" between Europe and Asia, and five hundred years ago defended this bridge against the Turk, who faced Mecca in prayer and Vienna in the hour of battle. But more important to these dark warriors of the mountain than the protection of western civilization has been the protection of their own numerous small landholdings. Like Macaulay's Horatius who saw "On Palatinus the white porch of his home," the Serb has been fighting for the very land on which he lives. No nation in history has such an unvarying succession of defensive wars as compared with wars of aggression. So that fact is reported in song. The defence of Nish, the defence of Belgrade, the defence of liberties, the defence of Christianity—these are the traditions of the race. And whenever the standard of Serbia was unfurled against Turkish encroachments in religion, in law, or in land, the Cross went forward in war against the Crescent. Each battle was a conflict of principles, of right with wrong. It is no mere chance that Bishop Nyegosh was buried as a true poet of his race, near the stars, on the summit of Lovtchen: mountain and bard are closely interwoven in the history of the people. Mr. Noyes correctly interpreted this spirit in the last war against the Turks. The words of one of his poems come out of an

English book as an almost exact parallel to a song sung by a peasant artilleryman who thrummed, on a crude one-stringed instrument, as he chanted:—

Comrades, you know not  
 The splendor of your blades!  
 This war is not as other wars:  
 The night shrinks with all her stars,  
 And Freedom rides before you  
 On the last of the Crusades!  
 . . . . .  
 Reverse the sword! The Crescent is rent asunder!  
 Lift up the hilt! Ride on with a sound of thunder!  
 Lift up the Cross! The cannon, the cannon are dumb.  
 The last Crusade rides into Byzantium!

But Serbia has not always been successful in her resistance to Turkish oppression and Austrian aggression. Nevertheless, time and again she has risen against the Moslem; she has played diplomacy with Austria and Russia, Berlin and London, to gain a little more aid. Always she has been fighting. A young soldier there is a veteran of three or four wars; an old man a veteran of eight or nine. When the Turks were driven from Serbia in the beginning of the nineteenth century, an autonomous principality was established with a constitutional government which, however altered by the changing Obrenovitch and Kara-georgevitch dynasties, always guarded the tiller of the soil. So, few people in the kingdom own more than three hundred acres of land, and almost all own at least twelve acres. This is the reason the small farmer has been so insistent in defending the land against the Moslem, in wishing to retain, if you will, the liberty of raising pork on his own property. Small wonder that he fought, yesterday and years ago, so long as he was able.

Yet in more recent times, since a political unit has been established for the Serbian nationality, it has been the aim of these folk to free all of their people from the imperial domination of Hungary and Austria. The assassination at Sarajevo was not an accident; it was the symbol of a hope for expansion, a hope expressed in the following little song, which, for want of a better title, I shall call "Emancipation":—

Bosnia, my dear Bosnia !  
The sky above thy land is blue,  
But yet no sun shines down on you,  
Poor Bosnia !

Liberty, cherished Liberty !  
Soon, soon our fighting men  
Shall cross the Drina, bringing then  
Your Liberty !

The tradition of mighty Marco Kraljevitch is typical of the nation. The last survivor of a terrible battle, the old epic says, climbed to a mountain-top, killed his steed with a single blow of his huge blade and, before dying, broke his lance and sword in seven pieces that no enemy might boast of taking his arms. And this legend has had its counterpart to-day, in the great retreat of 1915. Twice within the last two years the same thing has happened: at an artillery position on the Danube a certain battery could not withdraw its cannon supplies and so stayed at work, firing the overheated gun with such rapidity, in order to use up the munitions and leave none in enemy hands, that the advancing Austrians judged reënforcements had arrived—and retired. Again: the last stand of the Serbian army in retreat before the Germans and Bulgarians was made at Prisrend where more than a hundred of the French 75's were arranged in a huge semicircle pointed at the Bulgar army; and after five days of bloody fighting the Serbs fired their last shell, spiked the guns, and slipped through a narrow path where the river Drina cuts into the Albanian mountains. They fight to the end, these Serbs.

The similarity of these incidents to ancient tradition and song is amazing. A nation which cradles its youths, like the heroes of Homer, to antique chants of high courage ever preserves the ancient valor and produces new heroes for the inspiration of future ages. The warriors of Kumanovo and Prisrend were told in their childhood such tales as this, from an old Serbian epic:—

As morning dawned upon the Eastern hills,  
Two great ravens soared in circles black  
Above the spreading plain of Kossovo.  
They came to rest upon the tower, white

And tall, which had in ages long ago  
 Been built for our illustrious Serbian prince.  
 One croaked mournfully, the other spoke :  
 "Is this the tower of our glorious prince?  
 And is there no one in the tower now?"  
 The princess heard and, swiftly mounting up,  
 She climbed the tower and thus she questioned them :  
 "God bless you both! Tell me whence you came  
 So early on the morning wind?  
 Is it by chance from the field of Kossovo?  
 Did you see two powerful armies fight?  
 And which was victorious?"

In solemn tones the ravens both replied :  
 "We give thee many thanks, Militza, for  
 Thy blessing. Yea! It is from Kossovo.  
 We come with news of battle yesterday,  
 Between two powerful armies on the plain.  
 Of the Turks, a few remain ; but of the Serbs  
 All that live bleed from mortal wounds."

They fight to the end, these Serbs, because they always fight for freedom. "Tipperary" or "The Girl I Left Behind Me" do not form the themes of their battle songs. An expeditionary corps fighting away from home is unknown in their military annals: they always fight on their own ground to resist aggression. So the songs tell the same story:—

Rise, rise up, ye men of Serbia.  
 Unsheathe the sword in honor's cause.  
 Rise in defence of King and of Country ;  
 Never submit to enemies' laws.  
 Rally, rally, duty calls us,  
 And the foemen we shall slay.  
     With hearts aglow and colors flying,  
     Serbia shall crush her foes :  
 Save once more our Fatherland,  
 Our King and patriotic band.  
     Save once more our fatherland,  
     Our King and patriotic band.

Spare us, God, whom we adore,  
 From the shame of new defeat.  
 Hear again what we implore—  
 Strength in this our great distress.  
 Protection bring us as before,  
 Our fate is in Thy hands.  
     With hearts aglow and colors flying,  
     Serbia shall crush her foes.

Save once more our Fatherland,  
Our King and patriotic band.  
Save once more our Fatherland,  
Our King and patriotic band.

A continuous fighting tradition has made her literature patriotic. In the bookshops of Belgrade and Nish may be found translations of Maeterlinck, Shaw, Tolstoy, Daudet, and other Western authors: but few Serbian romances or poems. Their history is romance: their battle song is their verse. Like the "Marseillaise," the patriotic tunes were, if not written, at least immortalized on the march. Like "Rosalie" and the *Soixante-quinze ça c'est à nous*, sung to-day by the *poilus* of France, these traditional Serbian verses grew out of the life at the front. Many an old rhymed or musical chant tells of the exploits and unflinching bravery of their forefathers. The story of their political conflicts with Turkey, Austria, Russia, and Bulgaria is long and complicated, and often ends in defeat. Yet in all the hopeless muddle of Balkan warfare, there is no other nation with a finer record for courage than these Serbs. Their worth has been tested not only in victory, which means nothing, but in the hour of bitter defeat, which means that more idealism shall pass into rhyme. If, as Burns said, songs make the country, in Serbia 'tis courage makes the songs.

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